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ABSTRACT

Although the situations in which and for which drama teachers are trained vary widely, six principles can be applied to virtually all drama education programs. First, drama teacher education must be based upon the contexts in which the students will be teaching. Second, drama teacher education should be based upon the interpersonal skills both of the life process and of the drama process. Third, drama teachers in training must clearly understand and work with the kinds of knowledge that occur within dramatic action (the tacit) and the kinds that occur in discourse about dramatic action (the explicit). Fourth, the education of drama teachers should include training in the contemporary use of reason. Fifth, the education of drama teachers must focus on the practical knowledge they will require as teachers. Finally, teacher training in drama should respect the individual teacher's practical knowledge. In addition, drama education programs must be re-evaluated to include such features as more time and careful sequencing. Perhaps most importantly, a drama teacher must be a good teacher first. (DF)

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REHEARSING FOR LIFE:

TEACHING DRAMA TEACHERS

Richard Courtney

Address to the
Children's Theatre Association of America
(American Theatre Association)

Sheraton Centre, Toronto, August 4 1985

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INTRODUCTION

The training of drama teachers is our subject here today. I have spent over a quarter of a century working on the issue and yet, I must confess, I always approach this topic with great reservation.

Above all else, my experience tells me that there are no easy solutions to the problems before us. Teacher education as a whole is a highly complex area. The issues are not clear and, while many of the research studies have been brilliantly carried out, what they have said has, so often, been applicable to a particular group of teachers, a specific school system, or one type of training. There are no easy solutions to the problems of teacher education, and specifically to those in the arts.

PLURALITY OF CONTEXT

If this is the case generally, it is even more the case in the education of drama teachers. Let us begin by examining briefly what I will call "the plurality of context." That is to say, the situat-

ions IN which we train drama teachers, and the situations FOR which we train them, are multiple.

Those of us involved in the training of drama teachers are a motley crew. We come from a variety of backgrounds: from theatre of various kinds, from education, from therapy, from language, from literature, and even (if we are lucky) from drama education. We hear a lot about the individual differences of students. We should hear more about the individual differences of drama teachers and those who educate drama teachers.

We are involved in a motley set of programs. Some of us are preparing young drama students who will only have one pre-service course before they join the profession - often with a ludicrously small number of hours. Some of us are dealing with existing teachers (perhaps librarians or physical education teachers) who may have only one in-service drama course - with equally minimum hours. Those of us in Drama or Theatre Departments may, possibly, see the prospective students for one or two full-year courses in their B.F.A., or B.A., but not see them at all in their teacher-education year - or, if we do, the number of hours in such courses is still minimal. And some of us - as I do today - may meet them only when they become graduate students where the variety of their backgrounds is like the colours of the rainbow - and still we have insufficient time.

If we teachers of drama teachers come from different back-

grounds, and the programs we are responsible for are remarkably diverse, this is not the end of our differences. Far from it.

The contexts we work in are also very different. If we teach in the United States, it is likely that "drama" means different things in different grades - "creative dramatics" at the Elementary level but "theatre" at the Secondary level. In Canada, this difference can also be found in British Columbia but (at least according to government documents) not in any other Province - not officially, anyway. If we work in Britain, "theatre" is usually found only in out-of-school activities but spontaneous drama is what occurs in classrooms. Much of Canada and Australia have the same pattern. But if we work in Tanzania, Botswana, and various other African countries, drama teachers are likely to be working with traditional ritual dramas and dances which, only a few years ago, were the main religious activities of everyone in the community. If we work in Scandanavia and other parts of Europe, it is likely that drama is seen as an agent of social change. The situations that have to be addressed by drama teacher training vary radically according to where we live.

But so do the practices - the activities that are possible in classrooms, and how teachers can be trained for them. Let's take a few examples from the United States and from Canada. Two areas that I know well in the United States are New Mexico and New York. In the south of New Mexico, the rural farming and cowboy communities are radically different from any city block in the Bronx or in Queen's.

In Las Cruces, drama teachers may have to deal with 70% of the students in a class whose first language is Spanish. In New York, they may have to deal with a class 80% of whom speak a first language that is not English - indeed, there could be six or eight other languages spoken. Yet the "melting pot" philosophy in the States means that drama teachers should treat them as English-speaking Americans. United States drama teachers have to be trained to use practices that work in these specific situations.

In Canada, there are two official languages. Most students in Quebec use French in the classroom but elsewhere most use English. And while some rural areas are as isolated as the small towns of New Mexico - there are even pockets where English is not most of the students' first language - downtown Toronto schools are filled with students of various ethnic backgrounds. But Canada's "multicultural" policy - very different from "the melting pot" - is an attempt to encourage their ethnic backgrounds. Drama teachers must be trained to teach in these practical situations. Drama teachers cannot operate in some idealized community that has no real existence.

Then there are specific student differences - teaching the emotionally or physically handicapped, the gifted, and other "special" populations - or particular social differences - denominational schools, private schools, and so on and so forth.

This leads us to:

PRINCIPLE 1: DRAMA TEACHER EDUCATION MUST BE BASED ON THE DIFFERENT CONTEXTS IN WHICH THEY WILL BE TEACHING.

3

THE UNIQUENESS OF DRAMA

But these differences affect all teachers, do they not? What is so unique about drama?

The uniqueness of drama lies in what the students do. Drama education has no content. Or, perhaps, it is more precise to say that the content of drama in schools is different in KIND from all other subject areas. History is about history, and Maths is about maths. But drama is about nothing of that kind. The subject-matter of drama - the WHAT it is about - can be drawn from anywhere: the students' heads, scripts, TV, or other subjects in a school. Despite all the other differences that face a drama teacher, this is a common factor in all drama, whether created or scripted. Let us examine this issue in a little detail.

What does the teacher discuss with students in a creative drama or improvisation class? The discussion is about students' ACTION - what is to be done, or what has been done. If we look care-

fully at the major works on drama education - by Winifred Ward, Geraldine Brain Siks, Nellie McCaslin, Peter Slade, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Gisele Barret, David Booth, and many others - we will see that, in any drama class, the essence is the students' action and it is this which they and the teacher discuss. Drama is about dramatic action: how a person operates in such action; how we think, and how we express how we think in dramatic action. If drama has any content, this is what it is. And this is very different in kind from the content in other school subjects.

What makes drama unique is that its action (unlike any other school action) is about the TOTAL process of living. It is about human life, human existence, and the brief span between birth and death. The kindergarten child playing "mothers and fathers," the seven year old who, with others, creates a drama about an adventure, the teenager who is engaged in a group drama about a flood, or the performance of a play by Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Arthur Miller - all of these are about human beings in the living process. That's what makes them "drama" and not something else. Unless drama teacher education is firmly based on this notion, then it is not the education of the teachers of DRAMA.

When I am a teacher of drama, I am concerned with the whole living process. When I am a teacher of literature, of music, or of maths, I am concerned with a part of the living process. The medium of literature is language, the medium of music is sound, and the

medium of maths is abstract signs. But the medium of drama is THE PERSON - the presentation of Self, the actor acting. This does not make drama better or worse than other things done in schools. It merely shows its difference.

Yet drama is NOT life. It is a representation of life. In a drama classroom students act in two ways: in the actual world and in the fictional (or dramatized) world. Nine year olds improvising a story about miners are being two things: they are being themselves, and they are being miners. No wonder that Pirandello's image for the theatre is a mirror. In drama there are two realities: the "play" reality and that which is "really 'real'." Drama is about a "double" reality. It is 2-in-1 and 1-in-2. It is an active metaphor of existence, and the actor - any actor - is the metaphor of a living person.* In any drama, we are all "a costumed player."

This leads us to:

PRINCIPLE 2: DRAMA TEACHER EDUCATION MUST BE BASED UPON: (1) THE INTER-PERSONAL SKILLS OF THE LIFE PROCESS; AND (2) THE INTER-PERSONAL SKILLS OF THE DRAMA PROCESS.

This principle requires a certain adjustment from a teacher who believes that all drama teachers must, first, be masters of their particular fine art, namely, "theatre." But please note that I am talking of the vast majority of drama teachers in schools. I do

not doubt that training in theatrical skills is a top priority for those in professional acting schools - or even for those who are in "high schools for the performing arts" - but this raises questions I cannot deal with here.

Most drama teachers will teach in "the general program of studies" - drama courses for ALL students. These are distinct from those for the gifted and talented. Most students are not going to be the professional artists of the future. The needs of 99% of school students lie in learning in general education, and they will be taught by 99% of drama teachers. It is these drama teachers who must lead their students to the inter-personal skills of life and drama.

4

DRAMATIC KNOWLEDGE

In order to do so, what does a drama teacher need to know? A number of colleagues and myself are currently engaged in a two-year research project which is examining the nature of such knowledge (Courtney, Booth, Emerson and Kuzmich, 1987). I do not want to pre-judge our findings, but it is clear that drama teachers need to work with three ways of knowing: tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, and practical knowledge. Let us examine these three ways of knowing in a little detail. I will deal first with tacit and explicit

knowledge.

Explicit knowledge is (what I have called elsewhere) Knowing ABOUT.** This is the kind of knowing we obtain when we talk or write about experience. It is conscious knowing - the kind of knowledge that traditional teachers have often assumed is the only kind of knowledge. Examples would be facts like Paris is the capital of France, 6 + 7 = 13, or diabetics require insulin; or general operational principles like rain makes us wet, animals as a class include both tigers and human beings, or "this is how to write." Explicit knowledge usually takes place after, or before, we have the experience. It is talk about the past or the future. It is not talk about the present - about what is happening in the "now."

When we are within an experience "now" - either the experience of life or the experience of the drama - we are so busy doing it that we do not talk about it. Yet while we are creating dramatic action we are quite certainly obtaining knowledge. What kind of knowledge is this? Michael Polanyi (1958) calls it "personal knowledge," the primarily unconscious, intuitive, tacit way of knowing that is the foundation of our assumptions, beliefs and hunches. In drama terms, this is Knowledge IN. This cannot be formulated explicitly in words but it underlies almost all the actions and decisions we make in everyday life and in dramatic life. Each of us manifestly knows more than we can tell. And, moreover, tacit knowing underlies all explicit knowing. Even the most objective scientist, working

with deduction, relies on the generalized assumption of the classical syllogism.

Tacit or implicit knowledge has a particular structure. It is metaphorical. It always involves two things. We understand something in terms of another. Drama is metaphorical knowledge in action. For example, we tacitly understand much of the world through the body. As very young children, for example, we come to know the ideas of "near" and "far" in terms of our body, or the notions of "in" and "out" in terms of our mouth. The bodily level of tacit knowledge is best understood in the example of great sportsmen. During last year's hockey season, for example, Wayne Gretsky was asked to watch a re-play of his scoring a goal and describe it. He watched it but, when asked what had happened, he replied, "I just don't know." We come to understand the world in terms of the bodily metaphor. This can lead Marshall McLuhan (1964) to say that the wheel is the extension of the foot just as the pen is the extension of the hand - we tacitly understand the media we use in terms of the body.***

Contemporary research shows that we tacitly or implicitly learn complex structures and notions without using conscious cognitive processes. This appears to happen in two ways: first, through general differentiation; and second, through a gestalt-like global apprehension (Jones, 1971; Reber and Lewis, 1977). In other words, we unconsciously create a mental map of how things work in the world, and such maps appear to be isomorphic with structures in the

world. Such tacit learning does not have a one-to-one relation with the world. When we try to explain it consciously in words, it changes. This is because language is a different kind of map from the tacit maps of personal knowledge.

Importantly for our purposes, tacit knowing is how we operate when we are "a costumed player." Tacit knowledge is precisely what we work with IN drama. In dramatic action we implicitly learn. And research shows (Allen and Reber, 1980) that tacit learning is retained over a very long time. In contrast, explicit learning is relatively fragile and it is retained less permanently. When we are "a costumed player," we learn tacitly in ways that are much more permanent than in other forms of learning. This would account for why drama learnings are so strongly bonded to the Self. So, when drama leaders call for "drama across the curriculum" (Bolton, 1984), they are recognizing that the tacit level of knowing and learning IN drama is one of the most powerful tools available to all education.

Thus:

PRINCIPLE 3: DRAMA TEACHERS IN TRAINING MUST CLEARLY UNDERSTAND AND WORK WITH THE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE THAT OCCUR WITHIN DRAMATIC ACTION (THE TACIT) AND THE KINDS THAT OCCUR IN DISCOURSE ABOUT DRAMATIC ACTION (THE EXPLICIT).

THE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF DRAMA TEACHERS

This leads us to consider the third type of knowledge: the practical. Practical knowledge is the knowledge-base for practical reasoning. Good drama teachers cannot always explain in words why they do what they do. Yet they operate well within the classroom. How can this be?

The practical knowledge of drama teachers has two dimensions: the tacit and explicit; their beliefs and assumptions on the one hand, and their facts and categories on the other. When drama teachers talk or write about what they do, they usually do so with explicit knowledge. Their tacit knowledge is not normally mentioned. I would ask you to look at "how to do it" books in drama education. Almost all of them deal with explicit questions. Few deal with the implicit level. But that does not mean it does not exist.

From these two kinds of knowledge, drama teachers reason and these reasons become the operational mode of their practical knowledge. How do drama teachers reason? Modern notions of reasoning (Best, 1974) are far wider than Aristotle believed, and far more inclusive than those given in Introduction to Philosophy courses.

Let us take the thorny example: How can we tell whether a

particular performance of a Chinese dance is "good" or not? In the first place, we must distinguish between "liking" and "appreciating." There is a famous conversation between Wittgenstein and a student that goes something like this:

STUDENT: My landlady likes those porcelain dogs with limpid eyes. I don't. Why is that?

WITTGENSTEIN: Your landlady likes porcelain dogs with limpid eyes. You don't. Very well then - that's that!

In other words, liking has nothing to do with reasoning about quality. Appreciating and judgements about quality - basic for the drama teacher - are subject to reasons, or criteria. These reasons, or criteria, must be placed in context. Then they are both valid and objective. In the case of judging a Chinese dance, we can use four types of reason - deductive, inductive, interpretive and/or moral reasons. Deductive and inductive reasons may be largely explicit and interpretive and moral reasons may be mainly implicit, but these distinctions make little difference to the thinker; any one of them is as meaningful as any other. Yet unless we place such reasons in the total context of Chinese dance, the reasons are invalid and not objective.

This view of logic and reason, based on the work of Wittgenstein and David Best, is significant for the teaching of drama. In the case of the good drama teacher making judgements about students, he or she will use criteria, or reasons (implicit or explicit), for a judgement and place these in the context of the nature of the child,

the lesson, the school, and the total environment.

Thus:

PRINCIPLE 4: THE EDUCATION OF DRAMA TEACHERS MUST INCLUDE TRAINING IN THE CONTEMPORARY USE OF REASON.

The content of any teachers' practical knowledge includes a myriad things, including:

> knowledge of students' learning styles, interests, needs, strengths, and difficulties, a repertoire of instructional techniques and classroom management skills, theoretic knowledge of subject matter and of areas such as child development, learning and social theory, as well as knowledge of the social structure of the school and the community (Farrar, 1983).

To these elements of practical knowledge, a teacher of drama must add, as Lin Wright (1984) has said, some basic skills and some variables. In basic skills, the drama teacher should be able to: form appropriate, playable action for the group; facilitate the involvement of the individual and group in the drama; and guide individuals within the group towards an understanding of created drama. The variables, which affect the drama teacher's choices in curriculum and program design, are: the context of the sessions; the dramatic age stages of the group; the dynamics of the group; the capabilities, interests and needs of the individual within the group; and the

teacher.

Thus:

PRINCIPLE 5: THE EDUCATION OF DRAMA TEACHERS MUST FOCUS ON THE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE THEY WILL REQUIRE AS TEACHERS.

The notion of practical knowledge, however, is not an absolute one. That is to say, the practical knowledge of one drama teacher will not be exactly the same as the next drama teacher.

It is important for us to realize that, at any one historical moment, there are key notions in a society. From Descartes to the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the predominant metaphor was the machine: human beings, the cosmos, and life itself were all thought of as mechanisms. The final result was the behaviourism of Mill, Watson, Pavlov and Skinner - the most objective of sciences, the most mechanical and the least human.

But the great mental changes of humanity that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century destroyed the metaphor of the machine. One of the most influential notions of science is Heisenberg's theory of indeterminancy which says the following about the study of particles: they can be said to have position, or they can be said to have velocity, but they cannot IN ANY ACCURATE SENSE be said to have both. To simplify this: we can study an event in terms of space; or

we can study an event in terms of time; but no observer can accurately study both time and space simultaneously. The observer's view affects what is known. Heisenberg's theory is not only fundamental to contemporary physics - it is the underpinning to modern quantum theory, for example - but it affects all that we do.

In terms of the education of drama teachers, it means that the practical knowledge of one such teacher is just as valid as the practical knowledge of another - even if they are different. Both must, of course, be rational in the terms that I have outlined and, provided they are, then the perspective of Ruth Heinig is just as valid as that of Viola Spolin, that of Brian Way is just as valid as that of Gavin Bolton, and the practical knowledge of David Booth is just as valid as that of Gisele Barret.

Let us be clear what this means: provided a drama teacher's practical knowledge is rational, it is valid.

Thus:

PRINCIPLE 6: TEACHER TRAINING IN DRAMA MUST RESPECT THE INDIVIDUAL TEACHER'S PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE.

I am reminded, at this point, of some comments made here in Toronto in 1968 at the CCYDA annual conference by Brian Way. In response to a lady's question that implied that his "method" was

"right" and all others were "wrong," Brian thundered: "Please understand this - there is NO ONE WAY !"

6

CONCLUSION

But I have mentioned nothing about drama itself or the need for theatrical skills. Why is that? Don't we have to think about our "art form"? Should not the training of drama teachers include drama and theatre experiences?

Of course it should. But we must put these things in their perspective. A great theatrical artist need not be a great teacher, and a great teacher need not be a great theatrical artist. What do they have in common? They both have the discipline of drama as fundamental to their work. And, as I have already said, the essence of drama lies in two things: (1) in dramatic action itself; and (2) in the fact that dramatic action is the codification and representation of human life and the inter-relationships within it. The theatrical artist takes this essence and uses it in theatrical art. The teacher takes this essence and uses it for teaching and learning.

Teachers of drama in schools, therefore, may well acknowledge the great importance of theatrical art and skill - indeed, they

should do - but this is not the essence of their work. If it was, they would be actors not teachers. What I am suggesting is not all that radical: it is, quite simply, that to produce high-calibre teachers of drama and theatre in schools we must re-assess the notion of "art" and put it in its proper place. I am not denying the importance of theatre in the training of teachers. I am simply asking that its place should be revalued.

I do not wish to be misunderstood, so I reiterate: I am NOT meaning that the art form of drama and theatre is unimportant in schools. On the contrary, I claim it is vital. What I am stating, however, is that there are many perspectives on this art form. For the actor it is the process of acting, for the critic it is the process of analysis, for the director it is the process of directing, for the theatre historian it is the process of understanding the history of the art. And for the drama teacher it is the process of teaching by using practical knowledge.

A drama teacher must be a GOOD TEACHER FIRST. Without the appropriate practical knowledge, a drama teacher will not be a success. And there can be nothing worse than a poor drama teacher. Drama teachers MUST be good at what they do because he or she deals with the inner lives of their students. He or she is responsible for the thoughts and feelings of the students, for their actions and their forms of expression, and for the way they conduct their dramatic lives. In drama, students are rehearsing for life itself as

well as for art and, as a result, a drama teacher's responsibility is quite overwhelming in its power. It is surely time for us to acknowledge this, is it not?

If we do, then the six principles I have given here can become the basis for a total re-evaluation of drama teacher education. Let there be no mistake. Such programs urgently need the following:

* more time - much, much more time;
* careful sequencing so that a drama teacher's learning is seen end-on from the undergraduate level, through pre-service and in-service, to the graduate level and beyond;
* much more high-calibre scholarship and research, not because they provide us with answers, but because they improve both our thinking and our practical knowledge - and thus the learning of our students; and
* a genuinely human, flexible and contemporary approach so that the drama teachers of the future can function well both as people and as drama teachers.

I can do little better than cite from one of the great master-teachers in contemporary drama education. Dorothy Heathcote says:

> Teaching is creative work, and creative work has five features: the drive to want to do it; the feed-back to satisfy the having done it; the content of the doing of it - the level of function within the topic area;

> signals to communicate during the doing; and the rituals of going about it . . . we must make certain that <teachers> are given experience in committing others to work . . . <Teachers must> rely on what they are, where they are in their thinking and how they communicate their ideas (Johnson and O'Neill, 1984).

FOOTNOTES

* The two sides of "the double" - fiction (drama) and actual (life) - have the same temporal structure. Additionally there are variations of fictionalized time (Courtney, 1983, 1985a). This characterizes "the dramatic metaphor." My discussion of this issue is paralleled by "the theatre metaphor," the Theatrum Mundi, of "All the world's a stage."

** Cf. Courtney, 1980, 1982, 1985b.

*** Elsewhere I have discussed this issue in terms of the necessary skills of the workplace and marketplace (Courtney, 1985c), in terms of aesthetics (Courtney, 1985d), and as it relates to Amerindian education (Courtney, 1985e).

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